United Nations

Daily Highlights

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ As United Nations marks International Women's Day, Secretary-General says recognition of equal rights has not yet benefited women worldwide; President of Ireland says greater participation by women in politics would mean more emphasis on the rule of law over force.

+ Commission on Human Rights decides to appoint Special Rapporteur on violence against women, in resolution on integrating women's rights into United Nations mechanisms.

+ Special Commission inspection team assesses missile production capabilities at 14 sites in Iraq; seeks to identify effective monitoring procedures.

+ UNHCR appeals to donor nations to release funds pledged for repatriation of 700,000 Liberian refugees; launches emergency airlift to aid refugees returning to Burundi after ethnic violence last year.

+ Special Committee on United Nations Charter, beginning annual session, elects Francis Muthaura of Kenya as Chairman; to focus on aid to States affected by sanctions and cooperation with regional organizations.

+ Secretary-General says Global Conference on Small Island Developing States will test international commitment to UNCED plan of action; urges high-level representation by Member States.

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Despite a formal recognition of women's rights and a legal acceptance of women's equality with men, the lives of millions of women had not benefited from those those changes, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said today. Institutional sexism continued to deny women an equal share of power and decision-making in legislative chambers, governments and in public service.

Speaking at a public forum held at Headquarters to commemorate International Women's Day, the Secretary-General said the United Nations needed a more dynamic link between research into the status of women and

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action to promote equality for its programmes to be vigorous and effective. Recognition of the equality and dignity of women must be an integral part of all programmes -- for development, peace, security, democracy and human rights.

President Mary Robinson of Ireland said International Women's Day was not a form of tokenism but was helpful in highlighting the problems of women all over the world. Both genders would benefit from the increasing role women played in the public sector. With more women in politics, there would be greater emphasis on human rights generally, with more concerm for minority rights and the rule of law over force.

Meanwhile, General Assembly President S. R. Insanally today said that while there was increased awareness of the many issues concerning women, the problems they encountered continued to be pervasive. In a statement marking International Women's Day, he noted that the theme of the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference -- Action for Equality, Development and Peace -- would address the areas in which greater action was needed.

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The Commission on Human Rights has decided to appoint a Special Rapporteur on violence against women. The Commission took that action at a meeting in Geneva on Friday, under a resolution on integrating the rights of women into the human rights mechanisms of the United Nations. It also condemned all violations of the human rights of women in armed conflicts, and called for an effective response to violations including murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy.

The Commission adopted a number of other resolutions on Friday, including measures relating to the protection of the human rights of women, HIV/AIDS, terrorism, strengthening the rule of law, and strengthening the Centre for Human Rights. It also took action in connection with the human rights situation in Albania and Cambodia, and assistance in the field of human rights to Guatemala, Georgia and Somalia.

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An ballistic missile inspection team dispatched by the Special Commission on the disarmament of Iraq has recently assessed the capabilities of 14 sites in and around Baghdad and their potential use in the production of missiles. The team, led by Patrice Palanque of France and comprised of 14 experts from the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia and Ukraine, conducted the inspections between 17 and 25 February.

The sites inspected were identified by the Special Commission as possible support facilities for missile production activities. The team sought to identify effective monitoring procedures, and the data assembled will help the Commission to plan for ongoing monitoring and verification operations.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today appealed to major donor States to release funds pledged for the voluntary repatriation of some 700,000 Liberian refugees scattered in five countries. Under the terms of last year's Cotonou Peace Agreement, the UNHCR is responsible for repatriating refugees before elections next September. However, it has received only 10 per cent of the $60 million needed for the operation.

There are currently some 415,000 Liberian refugees in Guinea, 250,000 in Côte d'Ivoire, 20,000 in Ghana, 6,000 in Sierra Leone, and 3,000 in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, the UNHCR today launched an emergency airlift to aid refugees returning to Burundi after fleeing ethnic violence last year. More than 200,000 refugees have spontaneously returned to the country since tensions eased earlier this year. A total of seven flights will carry supplies from Amsterdam to Bujumbura, from where they will be transported to northern Burundi.

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The Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization yesterday began its annual session at Headquarters. The 47-member Special Committee elected Francis Muthaura (Kenya) as Chairman and approved the participation of 22 Member States and five inter-governmental organizations as observers in its work.

The Special Committee is mandated to examine issues relating to the maintenance of international peace and security, the peaceful settlement of disputes and the strengthening of the role of the Organization. In an opening statement, Hans Corell, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, said the Committee's work was particularly relevant in light of the Secretary-General's "An Agenda for Peace" and recent Security Council and General Assembly decisions.

During the three-week session, the Committee is expected to give priority attention to such issues as assistance to third States affected by sanctions and the enhancement of cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali yesterday said that the upcoming Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States would test the international community's determination to act on commitments made at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). In a message to the Preparatory Committee for the Conference, which will begin in Barbados on 25 April, he said a true global partnership would be needed if small island developing States were to have a sustainable, secure and equitable future. He therefore urged Member States to be represented at the Conference at the highest possible level.

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UNCED had acknowledged the special case of small island developing States because of their ecologically fragile and vulnerable nature, small size, geographic isolation and limited resources, the Secretary-General noted. As a result, it had been agreed that those States warranted special cooperation and assistance from the international community.

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